TOWARD OUR IRRESISTIBLE FUTURE:

Grounding in Who We Are and Who We Are Becoming

SiX and SiX Action
STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 - 2027

SIX STATE INNOVATION EXCHANGE

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WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE

As of this writing, an authoritarian presidential administration has regained and consolidated power with control of the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. Donald Trump is using the power of the presidency to inflict hate and cruelty via dozens of executive orders intended to preserve white supremacy and corporate dominance. Elon Musk is systematically–and illegally–gutting federal agency after federal agency. Government websites and datasets are being purged of any acknowledgment that challenges a view of whiteness and cisgenderedness as the default, centered American identity.

We at State Innovation Exchange (SiX) are deeply saddened as our communities are targeted and decades of progress are reversed. Amidst the chaos, disruption, and deep harm being inflicted, we are clear about the relevant strategic story for SiX.

Far-right extremists are executing a standard playbook that we have seen across the world and throughout history: scapegoat Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and people experiencing poverty for economic disparities that are actually caused by concentrated corporate and billionaire power.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE

Growing economic rage among working-class people manifested in the 2024 election. The current system is not serving them, and they are wondering–why protect it?

Against this backdrop, we know several things to be true:

01 The antidote to authoritarianism is a government that truly works for its people.

02 In this moment, states are best-positioned to deliver change for their people.

03 In making government work, the how of governance is more important than the what.

04 Increasingly, bold state-level leaders are practicing collaborative governance, a transformative alternative to traditional governance.

05 Despite the challenge, we can build the world we want to see.

01

The antidote to authoritarianism is a government that truly works for its people.
The United States has much to learn from the history of anti-authoritarian movements around the world. The path into authoritarianism is well-documented: when people do not see government deliver tangible improvements in their lives, mistrust in government institutions grows. This disillusionment fosters apathy, scapegoating, and polarization, creating fertile ground for authoritarian leaders to consolidate power.

Conversely, the path to a true democracy begins with rebuilding trust in government and restoring faith in civic engagement. When people see that their participation can lead to meaningful, material changes in their lives, they will reengage with democracy. When people participate fully in governance, their collective power[1] is no match for an authoritarian leader. Our resistance must ensure that our government delivers tangible change for its people.

1. *We believe agency is power. Today, oppressive systems prevent many people from wielding their full agency in shaping the rules that govern their lives. People wield their full power when they have access to contribute to governance processes; when they are meaningfully able to influence actions and decisions; and when they combine their unique strengths in common cause with others. We must reshape our governance systems to unlock this agency.*

2. *$3.1 trillion in FY2024, according to the National Association of State Budget Officers (https://www.nasbo.org/reports-data/state-expenditure-report).*

02

In this moment, states are best-positioned to deliver change for their people. States are the bellwethers of our democracy and among the most powerful arenas for enabling tangible improvements in people's lives. They oversee the allocation of more than $3 trillion in public funds annually[2], directly influencing critical areas such as healthcare, education, transportation, housing, economic development, public assistance, and infrastructure.

States are also demonstrating an ability to move more boldly—in both advancing progress and resisting harmful policies—than Congress. From passing paid family leave policies to advancing narratives around wealth taxes to defeating anti-trans bills and enshrining abortion rights in state constitutions through bipartisan cooperation, states have demonstrated their ability to lead in the interests of the people.

Moreover, states represent the front lines in the fight against anti-democratic forces, as they implement the rules governing voting and elections.

By transforming governance at the state level, we have the power to reimagine and rebuild the structures of power within our country to create a democracy that truly serves its people.

> ## "
> ### The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."
>
> ### – Audre Lorde

03

In making government work, the how of governance is more important than the what. Creating a government that truly serves its people requires more than simply trying harder or mobilizing ever greater sums of money. It demands a fundamental shift in how we operate within governance systems that were explicitly designed to prioritize the interests of a wealthy, white, male minority at the expense of the majority: Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and those experiencing poverty.

Traditional practices in politics–including people's everyday actions, habits, and ways of working–sustain these oppressive systems. Oppression is perpetuated not only explicitly, by people with the intent to oppress and through the structures and systems of our government, but also implicitly in individual actions. This includes actions by members of marginalized identities themselves. For example, white women played an important role in reelecting Donald Trump in 2024, and anti-Blackness is routinely perpetuated by people of color, including Black people. Oppression is reinforced even by the actions of the legislators, advocates, and grassroots leaders who are fighting for justice against oppressive systems.

Traditional policy advocacy approaches, including siloed competition, legislator accountability campaigns, and gatekeeping of information and power, represent the system functioning as designed: to produce and sustain the existing social and economic order. These practices

are products of the very system we seek to reform and, as such, they cannot transcend it. As poet and civil rights activist Audre Lorde so aptly said, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[3]

In practical terms, we cannot expect to dismantle oppressive structures in our country—such as voter suppression tactics like strict ID laws, reduced polling places, and voter roll purges; gerrymandered voting districts; and restrictive legislative structures like limited compensation, shortened sessions, and barriers to public participation—if we continue using the same practices that created and maintain these systems.

Writer, lawyer, and activist Andrea Ritchie challenges us to recognize that we all face a choice: to practice in ways that reinforce the current systems, or to build a new world by practicing differently.[4]

3. *Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." In Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, 110–113. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984.*

4. *Ritchie, Andrea J. Practicing New Worlds: Abolition and Emergent Strategies. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2023.*

04

Increasingly, bold state-level leaders are practicing collaborative governance, a transformative alternative to traditional governance. We are witnessing the rise of a governance practice that empowers the people who are most impacted by policies to wield their full agency in shaping them. Across the country, state legislators, local officials, advocates, and grassroots organizations are championing and practicing collaborative governance as a transformative alternative to traditional approaches.

Unlike the combative, transactional nature of traditional governance, collaborative governance is rooted in interdependence and authentic relationships. It empowers people experiencing structural oppression with the ability to shape their lived realities. It embraces the generational struggle for systemic change, rather than short-term fixes, and is inherently resistant to co-optation by corporate and authoritarian interests.

When people practice collaborative governance, not only are their policy efforts more successful because they harness the full power of communities and movements, but they also structurally dismantle oppression, shifting systemic power dynamics by strengthening the fabric connecting people with their government and with one another.

5.   Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).

6.   Octavia E. Butler, Parable of the Sower (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993).

05

Despite the challenge, we can build the world we want to see. This vision is bold, and transforming a governance system as vast and complex as ours may feel daunting. Yet we find inspiration in the wisdom of author and movement facilitator adrienne maree brown, who reminds us that small changes in individual interactions can ripple outward to create profound systemic transformation.[5] We are also guided by Afro-Futuristic, feminist science fiction author Octavia Butler, who teaches us that while change is inevitable, it can be shaped.[6]

Collaborative governance is already proving to be a viable and transformative alternative to traditional approaches, and the ranks of champions putting it into practice are growing. The direction of our democracy is not fixed—change can be shaped by those who choose to act. If enough of us embrace collaborative governance, we will bring forth a new and better world.

7.   https://www.normawong.com/

8.   Loretta J. Ross, interview by The Cut, "Here's a Refreshing Way to Think About Election Day," July 23, 2024, https://www.thecut.com/article/loretta-ross-interview-2024-election-kamala-harris.html.

The organizational strategy described in this document caps SiX's first decade of existence. In the spirit of the teachings of Indigenous Hawaiian leader and former state legislator Norma Wong, this strategy represents a grounding in who we are and who we are becoming[7] as part of the multi-generational struggle for liberation. As Professor Loretta J. Ross reminds us, the chain of justice stretches back to our ancestors and forward to our descendants.[8] This strategy reflects what SiX is called upon to do in our moment, with our link in the chain.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document outlines SiX's strategy, serving as both a tool for internal alignment and a resource to help external audiences understand our work, collaborate with us, and support us more effectively.

As a reference document, it provides a comprehensive perspective on why we exist, how we understand our strategic challenges, and the actions we plan to take. Readers can choose to engage with the document in its entirety or focus on specific sections of interest. For a more concise overview, we have prepared a shorter executive summary, which highlights key strategic decisions with minimal narrative content.

In this strategy, we articulate our organizational purpose, analyze our strategic context, identify our sources of strength, and lay out our strategic roadmap. Each section provides essential context and insights, followed by the key decisions we've made and their practical managerial implications.

We hope this document offers clarity and insight into SiX's work and inspires meaningful engagement with our vision and strategy.

***SiX and SiX Action** We fight for the world we want to see in an aligned fashion across separate, affiliated nonprofit organizations: State Innovation Exchange ("SiX"), a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan nonprofit, and SiX Action, a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization. This strategy describes affiliated endeavors to which each organization contributes its unique strengths. For convenience throughout this document, we may use "SiX," "we," and "our" in reference to the programming and people in both affiliated organizations. In practice, the activities, governance and finances of the two organizations are conducted separately from one another.*

OUR PURPOSE

- ⭐ **VISION**

- ⭐ **MISSION**

- ⭐ **PRACTICAL MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

VISION
What is the future we're fighting for?

OUR IRRESISTIBLE FUTURE
We dream of a future rooted in joy, liberation, resilience, and shared prosperity—a future where our democracy is vibrant, multiracial, and feminist, and where justice is real for those who have endured generational harm and oppression.

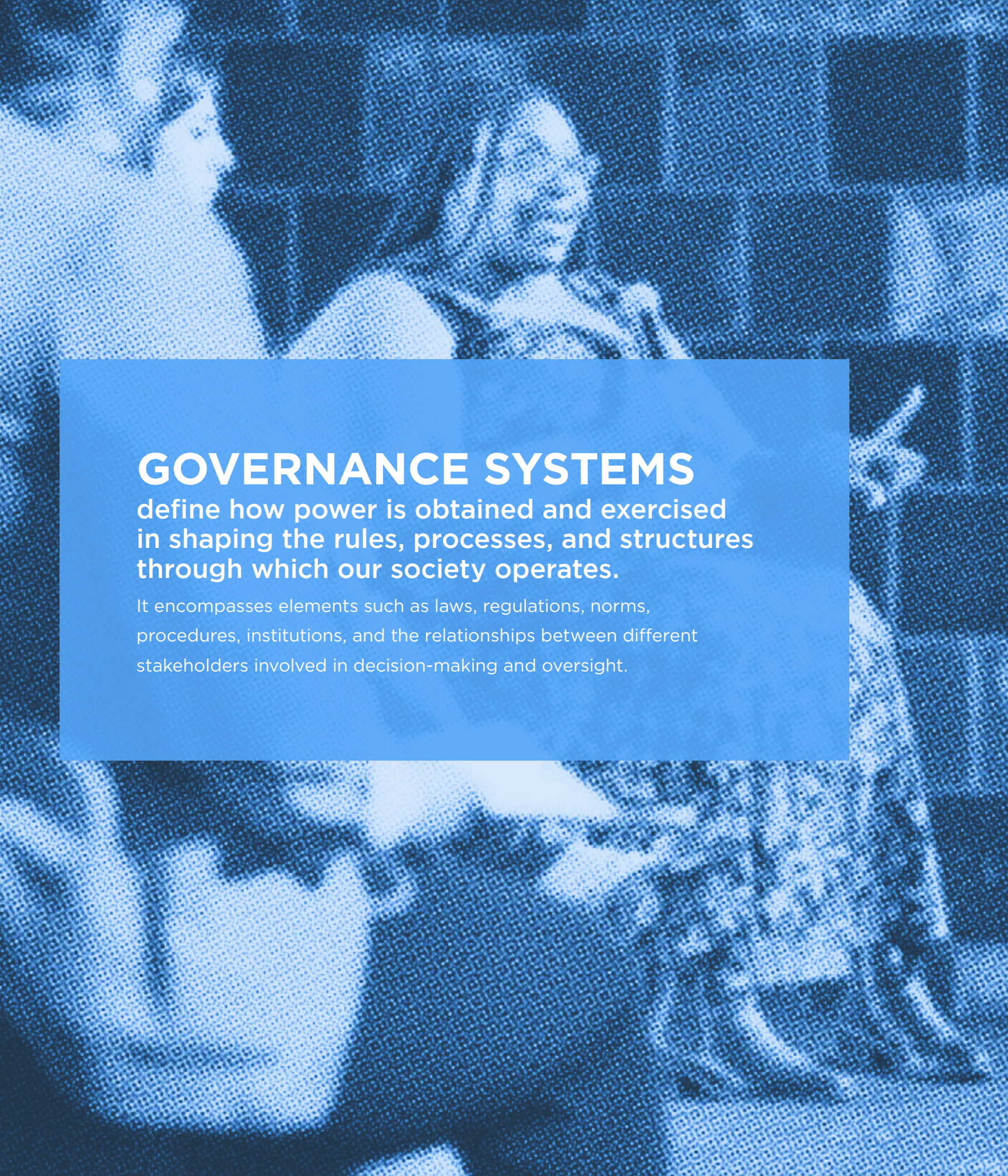**Our future is irresistible.**

Since SiX's founding, our focus has been on governance.

Governance systems define how power is obtained and exercised in making decisions that shape the social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions of daily life. These systems are not neutral; they are the mechanisms through which oppression has been perpetuated and the status quo is preserved.

Racial, gender, and other forms of oppression have shaped American governance systems since the colonial era, when men of European descent enacted a genocide, occupied stolen Native land, legislatively barred women from decision-making bodies, and encoded slavery into the U.S. Constitution. The very founding of this country was, in large part, a move to protect the institution of chattel slavery and the profits and power it delivered to the white, landowning, ruling class–including white women. Contrary to our country's origin myths of freedom and equality, our governance systems were intentionally designed, from the beginning, to concentrate wealth and power among the few.

While progress has been made in the centuries since, economic and identity-based oppression remain deeply embedded in our governance systems. These systems continue to uphold whiteness and patriarchy by systematically oppressing Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and people experiencing poverty, with the impacts of oppression multiplied at the intersection of these identities and conditions.

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

define how power is obtained and exercised in shaping the rules, processes, and structures through which our society operates.

It encompasses elements such as laws, regulations, norms, procedures, institutions, and the relationships between different stakeholders involved in decision-making and oversight.

These systems perpetuate oppression not only through their structures—such as voter suppression, gerrymandering, and felony disenfranchisement—but also through the practices of those working within them, including the practices of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and people experiencing poverty.

Traditional governance practices are exclusionary, with elitism and gatekeeping restricting access to critical conversations and decisions. They are zero-sum, rooted in the belief that for one person to gain, others—often those who are not cisgender white men—must lose. They are transactional, stripping the process of its human element and devaluing the voices of those with less power. They are extractive, expending people's labor, resources, energy, relationships, and humanity to bolster those elite few in power without consent and without healing, repairing, or replenishing what's spent. Finally, they are short-term in perspective, keeping people focused on playing a rigged game rather than envisioning and working together toward building a new world.

It is unrealistic to hope that these traditional practices will ever create the conditions for racial, gender, social, and economic justice.

But we can choose to practice differently.

OUR VISION

Practicing a new world can be a powerful act of transformation.

That is why we are guided by a vision of a different kind of practice within our governance systems–one that builds durable power and helps to create the conditions for justice for those most impacted by structural inequities. We believe this is what it will take to build a democracy that is vibrant, multiracial, and feminist; one that leads to a world rooted in joy, liberation, resilience, and shared prosperity for all.

SiX's vision names that future as the one we're fighting for:

We envision a future in which deeply collaborative efforts among elected officials, their constituents, and civil society leaders help create the conditions for racial, gender, social, and economic justice for all.

Our vision orients SiX's purpose within the movement of people and organizations engaged in the multi-generational struggle for racial, gender, social, and economic justice.

MISSION
Mission: What is our contribution to that fight?

A CRITICAL MOVEMENT GAP

Currently, our movement places disproportionate emphasis on governance at the federal level. Many assume that federal legislation and Supreme Court rulings, due to their broad reach, will fundamentally transform conditions for everyone. But this assumption is overly simplistic. Federal legislation and funding are ultimately implemented by the states, with significant leeway in how they are programmed. Even while Roe v. Wade provided the legal right to abortion across the nation, this did not translate into access to care for many women. While the importance of resistance and action at the state level is more obvious under the current authoritarian context at the federal level, the underlying dynamic has existed for many years.

A federal-first approach to policy advocacy not only diverts resources from state-level policymaking—the level that most directly shapes people's daily lives—but also concentrates the limited state-level investment in a small subset of states deemed strategically relevant to federal goals, leaving the rest under-resourced.

Our movement also places an outsized focus on winning elections, based on the assumption that controlling decision-making positions will automatically lead to effective policy. Yet policy change does not inherently follow from holding a legislative majority. This electoral focus often neglects governance—the crucial work that begins after elections are won—leaving it undervalued, underfunded, and ultimately less effective.

Additionally, many in our movement, including legislators, advocates, and donors, define success too narrowly as the passage of legislation. But when we lose sight of the real goal—improving material conditions for all— we risk sacrificing the needs of the most vulnerable communities, as well as the robust implementation and enforcement needed to make impact real.

Too often, we rely on model bills that are disconnected from broader community efforts, producing policies that fail to align with the unique contexts and needs of individual states. Even the passage of a strong bill falls short if a broad, engaged coalition has not been involved throughout the process. Without community ownership of the policy, there is little foundation for sustained advocacy to ensure its effective implementation, enforcement, and long-term defense.

If we hope to rebuild trust in a government that works for its people, we must confront and address these critical gaps in our movement.

A PROMISING OPPORTUNITY

Fortunately, we are seeing the emergence of an alternative approach to governance.

Across the country, bold state legislators, local elected officials, advocates, and grassroots organizations are practicing an alternative to traditional governance. This practice is coming to be called collaborative governance.

Across the country, bold state legislators, local elected officials, advocates, and grassroots organizations are practicing an alternative to traditional governance. This practice is coming to be called *collaborative governance*.

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

is the practice of shaping laws, regulations, and government institutions—via the active participation and leadership of the people they impact most—to create the conditions for all people to thrive.

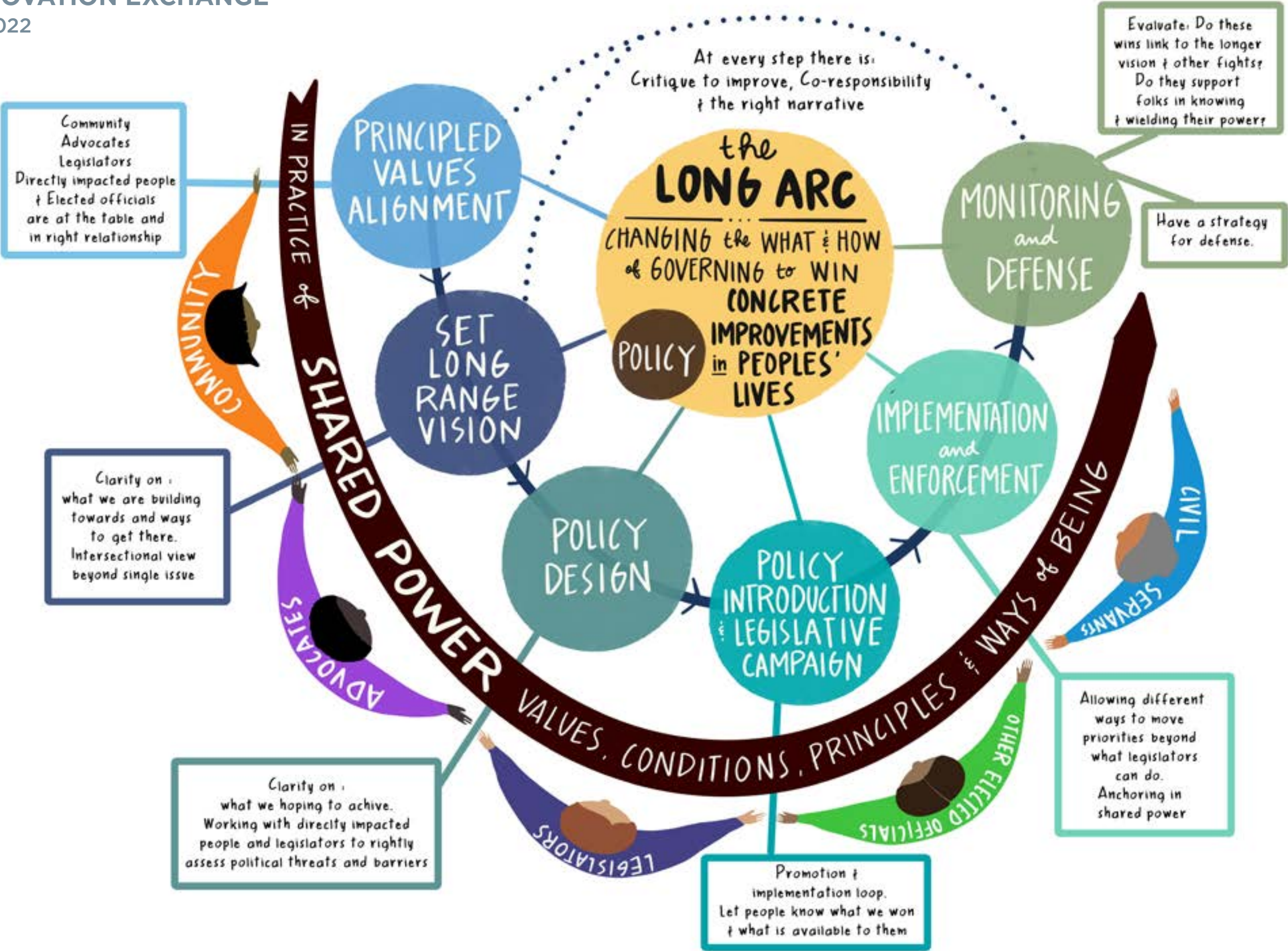*Collaborative governance is purposeful transformation.*
It is guided by an affirmative vision of a future in which racial, gender, social, and economic justice are real. It centers identities and communities who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes–acknowledging that, when government works for these people, then it must finally be working for everyone. It grows durable power for these communities by reconfiguring who is involved in governance and how they work together.

Collaborative governance embodies these principles throughout the full governance cycle—not just the legislative process–including:

- **Values alignment** – *What values define the world we are building? How do we commit to being together as we learn, grow, build, struggle, lose, and win together in this work?*

- **Long-range visioning** – *What will it look, feel, sound, smell, and taste like when we have achieved our goal?*

- **Policy design** – *What will it take for people to feel meaningful change in their lived experience? Will the most marginalized communities feel that change?*

- **Legislative campaign** – *Are we harnessing the full power of people with a collective interest in our goals–especially directly impacted people? Are we moving according to our values?*

- **Implementation and enforcement** – *Are departments, agencies, and funding mechanisms making the policy real for people in tangible ways, according to the spirit of the law?*

- **Monitoring, defense and improvement** – *Are people feeling meaningful change in their lived experience? Have we strengthened a capable, sustainable, community-rooted coalition around this cause?*

9.   For more, see Black Women Best: The Framework We Need for an Equitable Economy. *https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RI_Black-Women-Best_IssueBrief-202009.pdf*

Visual by Claudia Lopez

Collaborative governance gets the job of policymaking done–but it differs fundamentally from traditional governance in two important ways:

01 Right relationship: In contrast to the extractive, transactional orientation within traditional governance, collaborative governance is rooted in interdependence and trusting, resilient relationships.

We call this being in "right relationship," which is very different from simply having good working relationships. Being in right relationship involves seeing others as full and worthy humans, with their own, valid lived experiences, struggles, strengths, and goals–and an equally valid stake in the outcomes of a collaborative effort. It involves treating others with respect and care. It involves recognizing lived experience as valuable expertise. It involves healthily working through divergent needs and differences in opinion. It involves being able to discuss sensitive topics and understand others' points of view. It involves being able to repair trust and relationship when harm has been caused. Especially when the going gets tough.

Developing this kind of relationship requires a personal commitment to reflection and growth. It calls for transcending deeply embedded cultural habits of individualism, zero-sum competition, dominance, transaction, and extraction. Rest and healing are vital parts of this journey, making space for the personal transformation that fuels changes in our practice and, in turn, the governance system.

02 Affirmative vision: In contrast to the short-term, legislation-focused, binary pass-fail orientation in traditional governance, collaborative governance defines success in terms of progress toward systemic change and concrete visions of how people's lives can be different.

Too often, we articulate what we stand for in the negative—for example, "not white supremacy" or "not corporate dominance." Collaborative governance challenges us to define our goals in affirmative terms, describing not just what we oppose, but what we are building. It calls for a vision that is both concrete and aspirational, grounded in tangible improvements in people's daily lives.

Articulating an affirmative vision is critical because practicing collaborative governance is hard. It requires behavior change, generates friction with existing systems, and remains counter-cultural. To overcome these barriers, the goal must be inspiring, emotionally compelling—even irresistible. A concrete affirmative vision inspires the energy needed to navigate these challenges and sustain long-term commitment.

Crucially, collaborative governance recognizes that the transformation we seek is multi-generational. This perspective shifts us away from the short-term urgency of trying to win within a rigged game and instead frees us to rewrite the rules—or build an entirely new game altogether.

Getting stakeholders into right relationship and building a shared affirmative vision is no small feat. It requires a different kind of leadership and a deeper investment of time, energy, and emotional labor.

Yet, this work is essential if we are to make governance truly responsive to people's hopes and needs—and if we want our governance systems to actively create the conditions for racial, gender, social, and economic justice for all.

We know it is possible–because we've seen it first-hand.

OUR MISSION

While collaborative governance is building momentum at the state level–with a growing base of experience demonstrating that it is not only viable, but a more effective governance practice–it remains far from the dominant approach.

SiX's MISSION

State Innovation Exchange ("SiX") makes collaborative governance the dominant practice among state legislators as they govern in partnership with their constituents and civil society leaders. Collaborative governance transforms the conditions of power for people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes. As a result, our governance systems will advance racial, gender, social, and economic justice for all.

SiX ACTION'S MISSION

SiX Action inspires, emboldens and equips state legislators to secure and sustain racial, gender, social and economic justice in partnership with their constituents and civil society leaders. We enable bold policy agendas by promoting the practice of collaborative governance, which transforms the conditions of power for people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes.

Notably, our missions specify a desired change–the concrete change in the world that each organization exists to bring about. Clarity about our desired change shapes the strategic decisions that follow and points to several practical managerial implications.

The team behind this organizational strategy is working to change that picture through separate, affiliated nonprofit organizations: the State Innovation Exchange ("SiX"), a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan nonprofit, and SiX Action, a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization.

The mission of each organization explains its unique contribution to our movement's collective fight for our vision.

OUR PURPOSE: PRACTICAL MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Our vision and mission(s) have several important implications for how we understand and approach our work in SiX's next decade.

01 Our highest purpose is about transforming how state-level governance works.

02 Because people's hopes, dreams, struggles, and needs don't exist in siloes, any meaningful solutions must be intersectional.

03 Our mission is long-term.

04 While SiX and SiX Action fight for the same future, they are distinct entities making different contributions to that fight.

01 **Our highest purpose is about transforming how state-level governance works.** We focus on governance, the work that comes after elections, specifically at the state level, across the nation. While other national organizations also work at this intersection, we are among a small (but growing) ecosystem of organizations focusing on the how of governance, as distinct from the what. Many other organizations focus on passing policy largely with traditional mindsets, through traditional practices–inadvertently reinforcing the status quo. While we similarly support state legislators and partners in their policy efforts, we do so in service of changing practices in the governance process. Our desired change–our reason for existence–is that collaborative governance becomes the norm.

Dr. Monica McLemore's Retrofit, Reform, Reimagine framework, from her work in the reproductive health and justice space, is clarifying.[10] Generalizing her framework, retrofit refers to using existing systems to address immediate needs, reform refers to modifying existing systems, and reimagine refers to building new systems that differ in fundamental ways. Today, most other national organizations working at the state level are largely retrofitters–working within current systems to pursue policy goals. We at SiX touch on all three levels in our work, dedicating significant energy to ensuring that everything we do is thoughtfully designed to pursue both reform and reimagine goals, in addition to any retrofit goals.

For example, many of our legislators and partners are courageously defending against immediate harm to, or seeking near-term progress for, their communities (retrofit). Other organizations might approach this retrofit work in ways that reinforce status-quo power dynamics–

moving urgently by meaningfully engaging only an elite few, running accountability campaigns to exercise power over legislators, or sacrificing marginalized communities to secure votes. In contrast, as we stand with and actively support our legislators in immediate retrofit work, we ensure we help our partners do so in a way that both transforms the conditions of power (reform) and begins to practice a new set of values, mindsets, and ways of being (reimagine). We aspire to always be able to articulate how any of our program activities contributes to both reform and reimagine goals.

02 **Because people's hopes, dreams, struggles, and needs don't exist in siloes, any meaningful solutions must be intersectional.** Centering governance on meeting the real needs of real people involves understanding their challenges and goals in all their complexity and within their unique contexts. Unfortunately, our movement's organizations, strategies, and work tend to be structured along issue- and identity-based siloes. We believe it is impossible to truly address real-life problems–which are inherently intersectional–with a siloed approach.

At SiX, we strive to bring an intersectional lens to our work, and we have made significant progress in demonstrating how this can be done over our first decade. However, our programming and organizational structure have been shaped by historical funding models that largely follow issue and geographic siloes. As we continue evolving our program, operating, and financial models, a top priority will be deepening integration across areas. We are committed to delivering programming in a more holistic, intersectional way—including developing operational and financial structures that enable and sustain such an approach.

10.   McLemore, M. R. (2022). Using Retrofit, Reform, and Reimagine to Advance Toward Health Equity. Journal of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing, 36(2), 99–102.

03 **Our mission is long-term.** We are part of a multi-generational struggle for racial, gender, social, and economic justice. This means we take a long-term view in our work. While we drive for tangible short-term wins where possible, our mission is not driven by urgency for output or the pursuit of flashy achievements. Instead, our most important work lies in the steady, sometimes messy process of changing hearts and minds, transforming governance practices, and reshaping power structures. We are laying the foundation for systemic change that may not be fully realized within our lifetime.

Clarity in this purpose allows us to stay grounded, even when funders, peers, and partner legislators or organizers may not immediately recognize the value of work that yields its most tangible results over time. When funders are unwilling to directly support boundary-pushing, long-term investments, we strategically use our unrestricted funding to pilot initiatives and demonstrate their impact.

Our long-term mission also requires building a sustainable institution. Strong compliance and financial management systems are essential, as is deep alignment between our programming, organizational structures, and a scalable financial model. Just as important, sustainability means investing in our people—ensuring rest, healing, growth, development, and equitable compensation. If we are truly committed to building a lasting institution, we must be willing to make the necessary financial investments to support all of the above.

04 **While SiX and SiX Action fight for the same future, they are distinct entities making different contributions to that fight.** SiX and SiX Action share a vision, but have distinct (though complementary) missions.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, SiX has distinct strengths and programmatic opportunities relating to receiving tax-deductible donations and conducting non-partisan work to build capacity; deliver civic education; strengthen legislator relationships and community; organize within state governance ecosystems; support leaders in envisioning a bold, affirmative future; and champion the practice of collaborative governance.

As a 501(c)(4) organization, SiX Action has distinct strengths in being able to engage in lobbying to support state legislators and partners in their legislative campaigns. Direct support of legislative campaigns and grassroots lobbying is an important component of our work, because the most powerful way to inspire people to become champions of collaborative governance is to help them experience it directly.

As we design updated program, operating, and financial models, we should explicitly design to optimize the strengths of each organization. Notably, we should design for significant growth in SiX Action funding and programming, from the relatively small base it has today. Additionally, as we enter an era of expected political weaponization of the federal government against nonprofit organizations, our robust compliance relating to the separation of these organizations is very important.

OUR ANALYSIS

DIAGNOSIS
What strategic challenge must we overcome?

The missions of SiX and SiX Action define the desired changes each organization exists to bring about. SiX's desired change is that collaborative governance becomes standard practice in state level governance. SiX Action's desired change is that collaborative governance enables bolder policy agendas to advance racial, gender, social, and economic justice.

What stands in the way of these changes? While many complex factors shape our governance systems, our diagnosis of the current landscape allows us to cut through the noise and identify the most strategically relevant dynamics that must be addressed. We see important challenges relating to "5 Ps," at three levels:

01 PEOPLE
AND PRACTICE

02 POWER
AND POLICY

03 PERMANENCE

01 **People and Practice.** Social systems, including our governance system, are sustained by the practices of the people within them. Traditional governance practices are shaped by deeply embedded values and mental models rooted in the dominant worldview—one defined by the interlocking forces of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.

As discussed above, these governance practices are exclusionary and elitist. They are siloed and short-sighted. They prioritize individualism and competition over collaboration and collective well-being. They are driven by zero-sum thinking, dominance, and transactional interactions rather than trust and shared power. These practices do more than maintain the status quo—they actively deepen the power of those who already have it while further marginalizing those who do not. Specifically, they exclude Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and those experiencing poverty from equitable participation in governance. To change the system, we must change who is at the heart of governance processes—and that requires a change in how we practice.

Yet changing behavior is difficult. These practices are deeply ingrained, reinforced by habit, and upheld by a dominant worldview that most people have never been challenged to question. Because individual transformation is rare, many accept these practices as the only way to get things done—without realizing that alternative, more just approaches are both possible and necessary.

02 **Power and Policy.** Power dynamics at every level prevent communities of color, low-income populations, and other marginalized groups from transforming governance systems to serve them instead of the interests of corporations and the wealthy, white elite.

One major barrier is the divided structure of our movement, where issue interests and identity groups often operate in silos, sometimes even at odds with one another. This fragmentation weakens what should be a collective effort to rebalance power—shifting it away from corporations and wealthy white men and toward Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and those experiencing poverty.

At the same time, imbalanced resourcing in politics gives large corporations disproportionate influence in policymaking. State legislators, who often lack policy expertise and operate with minimal staff support, frequently turn to well-resourced corporate lobbyists who maintain a constant presence in the statehouse. These lobbyists provide legislators with research, policy proposals, and strategic guidance—shaping legislative agendas in ways that serve corporate interests rather than the public good.

Structural barriers to civic participation further entrench these inequities. Voter suppression tactics—including strict ID laws, reduced polling places, and voter roll purges—disproportionately disenfranchise marginalized communities. Gerrymandered voting districts further dilute their voices, fragmenting communities and undermining fair representation. Within the legislative process itself, limited compensation, restrictive session lengths, and barriers to public participation make it difficult for people who are not independently wealthy to meaningfully engage in public leadership.

Even when our movement succeeds in passing progressive policies, they often fail to deliver the intended impact—both in improving people's lives and in shifting power toward historically marginalized communities. Policies are frequently designed by think tanks and elite organizations with little direct input from the people they affect. While model bills provide efficiency, they often result in policies that are poorly tailored to the unique contexts of each state and are divorced from the organizing efforts of local movements, many of which have deep, long-term strategies underway. In our urgency to pass legislation, the needs of the most vulnerable communities are often sacrificed to secure votes. Similarly, implementation and enforcement mechanisms—critical to ensuring real impact—are frequently compromised to secure votes.

Sometimes, even policy victories can unintentionally reinforce existing power structures. When we design legislation with a short-term perspective and within the dominant neoliberal worldview, we risk achieving symbolic wins that ultimately weaken our long-term power. For example, affordable housing expansions that funnel public money to corporate developers may provide temporary relief but ultimately strengthen the financial and political influence of corporate actors who oppose broader progressive change. Moreover, many advocacy organizations lack the capacity or expertise to engage in policy implementation, rulemaking, program administration, and oversight—the very spaces where legislative wins can be further diluted or undermined.

At an even more fundamental level, public disengagement from governance poses an existential threat to American democracy itself. Many people—particularly those from marginalized communities—are not seeing tangible improvements in their lives and are concluding that government cannot work for them. This growing disillusionment erodes trust in democratic institutions, creating a dangerous vacuum that authoritarian forces can exploit, accelerating the decline of democracy and the rise of oppressive systems of power.

03

Permanence. Amidst these challenges, there are glimmers of promise, as a growing number of state legislators and organizers are rejecting traditional practices in favor of collaborative governance. However, among the 7,386 state legislators nationwide as of 2024, champions of collaborative governance remain relatively few. Several barriers hinder the broader adoption and permanence of these practices.

One significant challenge is that collaborative governance, while rooted in ancestral wisdom and practices, is still in relative infancy within modern state-level governance systems, and its lack of formalization presents a key obstacle. Though intuitive or tacitly understood when experienced firsthand, collaborative governance has yet to be clearly structured and articulated in ways that make it easily accessible and generalizable to different contexts. This limits its potential to scale and spread.

Additionally, for the champions who do embrace this approach, the journey can feel isolating and exhausting. Working against entrenched norms and systems often leaves these leaders navigating their efforts alone and in hostile surroundings, making them particularly vulnerable to burnout. Even as we need to grow the movement of collaborative governance practitioners, these conditions make it difficult for our champions to remain in the fight.

As a result of these challenges, we remain far from achieving the needed critical mass of collaborative governance champions—when the practice will gain self-replicating energy and spread to become an enduring norm.

THEORY OF CHANGE

How can we overcome the strategic challenge?

Thankfully, our diagnosis points to a clear theory for overcoming these strategic challenges and achieving our desired change.

Specifically, we believe that when collaborative governance is practiced at scale, it sets off a chain of outcomes that can reshape power and policy—ultimately driving meaningful racial, gender, social, and economic justice for all those who have historically faced systemic barriers to fully wielding their agency in governance.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Collaborative Governance Outcomes:
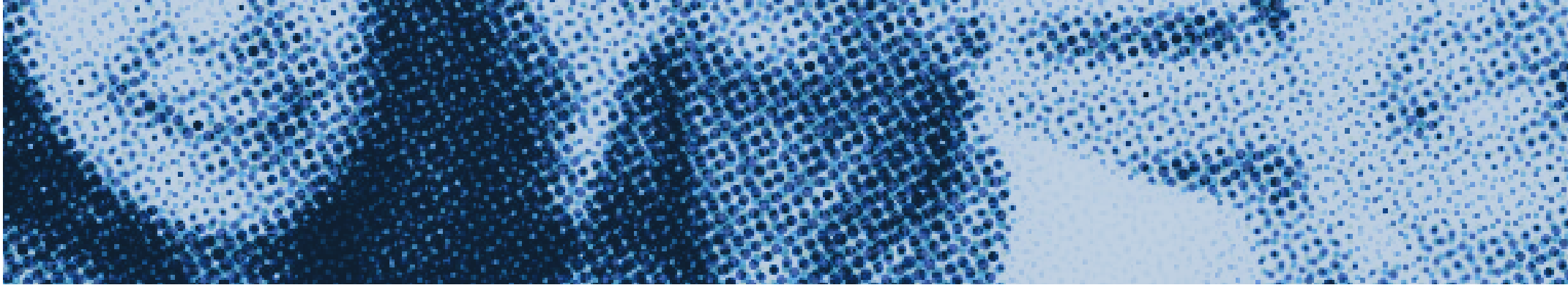
| PEOPLE AND PRACTICE	POWER AND POLICY	PERMANENCE	DESIRED CHANGE

If state legislators practice collaborative governance as they govern in partnership with their constituents and civil society leaders...

...policy and procedural wins will help people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes to secure racial, gender, social, and economic justice... and coalitions will shift structural power dynamics, giving them greater agency in governance processes...

And if collaborative governance is adopted broadly...

...Our governance system will be transformed to produce meaningful racial, gender, social, and economic justice outcomes for all people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes

PEOPLE AND PRACTICE

POWER AND POLICY

PERMANENCE
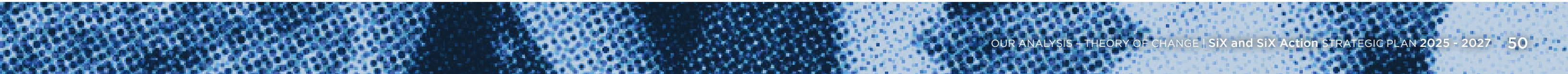
DESIRED CHANGE

Communities will be centered: Policy processes will be designed for people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes (instead of those who already have the most power)

Strategies will stitch across boundaries: Strategies and coalitions will be more expansive and multi-dimensional through connection across states, movements, roles, and ideologies (instead of weakened by division and isolation)

Coalitions will maximize complementary strengths: The full potential of diverse collaborators will be harnessed (instead of remaining untapped because of exclusion or a narrow framing of roles)

Goals will be shared and decision processes will be collaborative: Collaborators will establish a shared vision, long-term goals, and other enablers of strong collaborative processes (instead of remaining limited by individualistic and competitive structures, tools and norms)

Collaborators will build trusting, lasting relationships: Diverse collaborators will productively work through conflict and work together in multiple efforts over time (instead of disbanding and competing with one another)

Hearts and minds will shift: Collaborators will adopt and spread the belief that practicing collaboration (instead of competition) is not only possible, but more effective in governance

Policy and procedural wins

- Passing legislation that meets community-defined needs, especially those of the people most impacted by systemic oppression
- Effectively implementing and enforcing policy, and defending policy across ideological shifts
- Taking action via administrative processes (such as budgeting) to meet community- defined needs even when passing legislation is not possible
- Defeating or weakening policy that furthers the oppression of those who are not wealthy, white men

Transformed conditions of power

- More robust movements of people working together as the intersections among issues become well-understood
- Reduced legislator reliance on the corporate lobby, when advocates serve as collaborative resources rather than adversaries
- Greater influence by people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes, as their leaders and organizations gain visibility and experience
- Structural reforms that remove mechanisms of oppression from governance processes (e.g., voting rights, legislative modernization, equitable redistricting, transformation of money in politics)
- Increased belief in government institutions and the associated increase in political engagement among those impacted by systemic oppression.

Collaborative governance becomes the norm

- SiX collaborators continue to apply collaborative governance across different contexts and without SiX's support
- People with whom SiX has never worked adopt collaborative governance practices

...Our governance system will be transformed to produce meaningful racial, gender, social, and economic justice outcomes for all people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes.
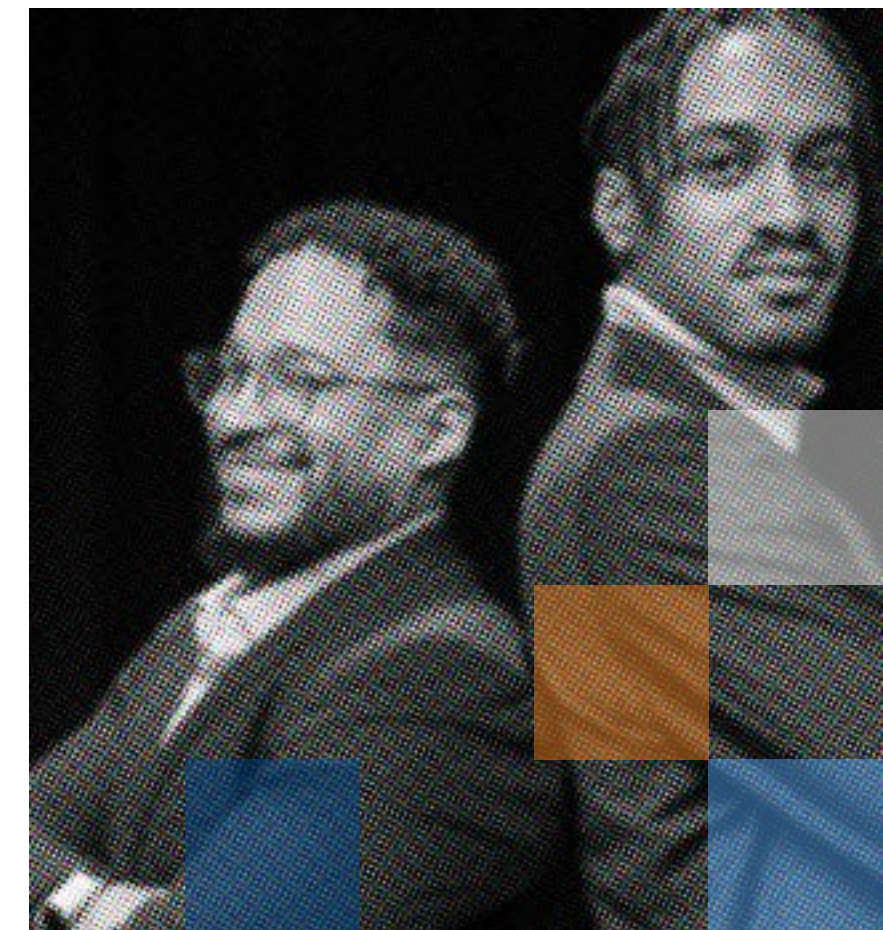
Drawing from movement wisdom,academic research, our programming, and the lived experience of the people at SiX, the following is our theory:

IF state legislators practice collaborative governance as they govern in partnership with their constituents and civil society leaders...

...THEN...

- **Communities will be centered:** Policy processes will be designed for people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes (instead of those who already have the most power),

- **Strategies will stitch across boundaries:** Strategies and coalitions will be more expansive and multi-dimensional through connection across states, movements, roles, and ideologies (instead of weakened by division and isolation),

- **Coalitions will maximize complementary strengths:** The full potential of diverse collaborators will be harnessed (instead of remaining untapped as a result of exclusion or a narrow framing of roles),

- **Goals will be shared and decision processes will be collaborative:** Collaborators will establish a shared vision, long-term goals, and other enablers of strong collaborative processes (instead of remaining limited by individualistic and competitive structures, tools and norms),

- **Collaborators will build trusting, lasting relationships:** Diverse collaborators will productively work through conflict and work together in multiple efforts over time (instead of disbanding and competing with one another), and

- **Hearts and minds will shift:** Collaborators will adopt and spread the belief that practicing collaboration (instead of competition) is not only possible, but more effective in governance.

AS A RESULT...

- **Policy and procedural wins in the short, medium, and long term** will help people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes to secure racial, gender, social, and economic justice outcomes that they actually feel in their lived experience. This includes...
- Passing legislation that meets community-defined needs, especially those of the people most impacted by systemic oppression,
- Effectively implementing and enforcing policy, and defending policy across ideological shifts,
- Taking action via administrative processes (such as budgeting) to meet community-defined needs even when passing legislation is not possible, and
- Defeating or weakening policy that furthers the oppression of those who are not wealthy, white men.
- ...ALSO AS A RESULT...Coalitions will shift structural power dynamics, giving greater agency to people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes. This will include...
- More robust movements of people working together as the intersections among issues become well-understood,
- Reduced legislator reliance on the corporate lobby, when advocates serve as collaborative resources rather than adversaries,
- Greater influence by the people most impacted by systemic oppression, as their leaders and organizations gain visibility and experience,
- Structural reforms that remove mechanisms of oppression from governance processes (e.g., voting rights, legislative modernization, equitable redistricting, transformation of money in politics), and
- Increased belief in government institutions and the associated increase in civicpolitical engagement among those impacted by systemic oppression.

AND IF...

- Collaborative governance is adopted broadly, when...
- SiX collaborators continue to apply collaborative governance across different contexts and without SiX's support,
- People with whom SiX has never worked adopt collaborative governance practices,
- Collaborative governance becomes the dominant approach within "early-adopter" state governance ecosystems, and
- Ecosystem-wide adoption of collaborative governance spreads to additional states...

...THEN ULTIMATELY...

Our governance system will be transformed to produce meaningful racial, gender, social, and economic justice outcomes for all people who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes.

OUR ANALYSIS: PRACTICAL MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Our diagnosis and theory of change have several important managerial implications for our programming and priorities in SiX's next decade.

01   We are advocating a counter-cultural practice.

02   Collaborative governance adoption must gain self-replicating energy.

03   Our success is measured differently than many peers in the political space.

01

We are advocating a counter-cultural practice. We can glean valuable design and application lessons from theories and frameworks for changing beliefs, norms, and systems, as well as from past social change movements, including the United States civil rights movement, the Movement for Black Lives, and the global feminist movement.

Our initial conversations have identified several implications for SiX's programming:

1. Making civic education a more explicit, systematized, and scalable element of our programming can ensure that everyone we engage is primed to do the kind of worldview-questioning, individually transformative work required for people to fully embrace and practice collaborative governance.

2. Likewise, continued thought leadership and narrative-shaping work within our movement–specifically relating to the paradigm shift to collaborative governance and its application in state level governance– will remain an important role for SiX to play.

3. It feels equally important that we deepen, systematize, and scale our work to help legislators and partners feel in community and held and supported as whole people. People need rest, solidarity, and psychological safety to do the kind of personal change needed, and to take the kind of bold risks we are encouraging, in this work. We should strive to both design these supports into our programming more broadly, a s well as to continue to champion this philosophy within our movement.

Collaborative governance adoption must gain self-replicating energy. SiX's mission is to make collaborative governance the norm within state level governance. However, we do not expect to achieve this mission by being directly involved in every state policy process. Rather, our success hinges on the practice of collaborative governance spreading organically, beyond our direct reach.

Our initial conversations have identified several implications for SiX's programming:

1. Our most powerful lever for expanding collaborative governance is inspiring, supporting, and amplifying both legislator and advocate champions—who, in turn, spread the practice by "converting" others. In our experience, this conversion happens primarily experientially–when people have the deeply transformative experience of a collaborative governance process, they can feel the difference and the irresistibility of a world in which governance works that way. The importance of this self-replicating conversion process has significant implications for the ongoing evolution of our program model, requiring us to be intentional in how we cultivate and sustain champions at scale.

   A champion who is able to convert others to become champions themselves must have a deep command of collaborative governance, the courage to practice it wholeheartedly, and the ability to both inspire and teach others. In our experience, this level of command requires repeated, progressively deeper engagement with SiX's programming.

   As SiX continues to evolve, we must intentionally design our program model to nurture and develop collaborative governance champions. This likely means crafting a more structured journey for legislators—one that moves them through our programming in a coordinated way to generate intentional "champion-building"

outcomes, with greater integration of our programming than we have today. It also requires strengthening our systems and processes (for example, a more capable customer relationship management or CRM system and process) to initiate, sustain, and deepen relationships with legislators throughout this journey.

2. The collaborative governance practice needs further formalization and greater accessibility in order to spread organically. Formalization of the collaborative governance practice involves translation of the general principles and success stories we have today into concrete, contextualized methodologies and tools for getting the work of state governance done. When legislators and advocates face each step in the governance process–for example, to design policy or run a campaign to get a bill passed–they must have concrete alternatives to traditional practices for getting the task done successfully.

   We have already made progress on formalizing the practice, for example in our Progressive Governance Academy (PGA) curriculum, but legislators and advocates would benefit from a more rigorous and comprehensive set of methodologies and tools. Moreover, PGA programming in its current form has had too narrow a reach to activate our theory of change at scale.

   Going forward, SiX will remain best-positioned to continue leading the development of a formal collaborative governance practice at the state level, and this should take on increased priority in our program model.

Our success is measured differently than many peers in the political space. Many other organizations focused on governance at the state level have defined success in terms of the adoption of their respective policy agenda. For them–and for many funders who share a policy-focused orientation–a central metric of success is whether or not their bills passed during a given legislative session.

We define our success differently. Our desired changes are that collaborative governance becomes the norm in state level governance, and that collaborative governance enables bolder policy agendas to advance racial, gender, social, and economic justice for those who have historically faced systemic barriers to wielding their full agency in governance processes. Our theory of change explains the chain of outcomes we believe will lead to our desired change.

We measure our success in terms of the extent to which we are activating that chain of outcomes.

While output measurements are helpful in understanding the scope of our work, our most strategically-relevant metrics are outcome metrics. Our ongoing monitoring and evaluation work defines how we measure these outcomes, learn from the results, and translate that learning into action.

It is easiest for us to measure nearer-term outcomes–those relating to people and practice–which tell us whether we are successful in supporting legislators and advocates to shift their practices toward collaborative governance. We are already defining metrics and building measurement systems to gather this level of outcome data.

While it is more difficult to measure power and policy outcomes quantitatively, our qualitative measurement methodologies, including our impact storytelling case studies, are very valuable in helping us understand our impact and learn from that experience.

We are currently not able to directly measure the permanence of our desired change–but this would not be a valuable use of resources anyway, at least not for a long time. Our measurement at other levels of our theory of change will give us the right level of information to help us manage effectively and strategically during this phase of our strategy journey.

Going forward, it will be important to continue our investment of time, resources, and energy into our measurement and learning activities, which are essential to our ability to successfully manage the organization in service of our strategy.

OUR STRENGTH

We are building an institution—and a new world—based on five core values:

01 **Adaptability and Imagination.** Reflects our openness to change and our belief in the power of learning and dreaming.

02 **Connection, Relationship, and Collaboration.** Reflects our organizational belief that relationships, particularly how we build and partner with others, are the foundation for our work.

03 **Wholeness, Consideration, and Care.** Reflects our belief in the importance of remembering we are whole people and treating each other and our communities as such.

04 **Belonging and Difference.** Reflects our commitment to embracing and welcoming difference and acknowledging the systems that use those differences against us.

05 **Sustainability and Perseverance.** Reflects our understanding of both the power of rest and the commitment necessary to see the change we envision for the world.

VALUES

What powers our strength as a team?

We are worldbuilding at SiX. That is, we are bringing an irresistible future to life by practicing it into existence. We are proving that a more caring, more interdependent, more joyful, more liberatory way of working together is possible. Our mission requires us to model and practice the values in which this new world is rooted not only externally with legislators, partners, and advocates, but also internally, with one another.

01 **Adaptability and Imagination.** Reflects our openness to change and our belief in the power of learning and dreaming.

- We believe there are multiple ways of knowing and welcome opportunities to learn from our past, present and future.
- We remain open to learning, sharing, and shifting our approach, perspective and process.
- We embrace the necessity of change within ourselves, our communities, and organization.
- We have both the audacity to dream beyond what seems impossible and the boldness to pursue those possibilities with tenacity.

02 **Connection, Relationship, and Collaboration.** Reflects our organizational belief that relationships, particularly how we build and partner with others, are the foundation for our work.

- We believe that authentic relationships and principled partnerships are the foundation for building people-centered power within systems that will lead to communities living the lives that we deserve and are fighting for.
- We cultivate relationships, grounded in trust and respect, to work toward a common purpose and shared vision.
- We believe that the quality of our work and the path we take to achieve it are equally important, so our passion for excellence does not outweigh accountability to our partners, communities, and each other.
- We operate with integrity, acknowledging our mistakes and attending to the impacts.
- We are honest, kind, and direct in instances of conflict and believe that principled tension is necessary for the advancement of our work.

03 **Wholeness, Consideration, and Care.** Reflects our belief in the importance of remembering we are whole people and treating each other and our communities as such.

- We are whole human beings and honor the fullness of our lives and the lives of those around us.
- We believe that all people and communities are deserving of joy, rest, safety, and respect.
- We are flexible in how we work while respecting the space, boundaries, and care of ourselves and those around us.
- We are responsible for our own emotions and how those emotions shape how we respond to and engage with others.

04 **Belonging and Difference.** Reflects our commitment to embracing and welcoming difference and acknowledging the systems that use those differences against us.

- We believe in the power of our shared humanity and are committed to upholding the inherent value of people, across identities, experiences, and perspectives.
- We acknowledge the systems that work to oppress the communities we are a part of and collaborate with, and which actively work against their efforts to build the world we want to live in.
- We oppose all forms of racism and are committed to learning and proactively eliminating ways in which our behaviors, beliefs and policies reinforce racist ideas and actions.

05 **Sustainability and Perseverance.** Reflects our understanding of both the power of rest and the commitment necessary to see the change we envision for the world.

- We prioritize the sustainability of ourselves, our communities, and our organization by pausing when necessary and reducing harm wherever possible.
- We understand the value and importance of access to information and learning and operate in a stance of abundance and generosity of resources, ability, and knowledge.
- We recognize the "long arc" of systemic change work and are deeply invested in the generational commitment and organizing necessary to realize the world we want to live and thrive in.
- We strive to make these values real in our organization in many ways, including in our organizational culture, which reflects "how we do things around here"; in our benefits and human resources practices; in our compensation philosophy; and in our programming.
- Our practice of these values, including through our culture of care, unlocks both our individual brilliance and strength, and the power of what we can achieve together.

VALUE PROPOSITION
What unique value do we create?

Over SiX's first decade, we evolved to offer unique value to the state governance ecosystem. Our value proposition explains how this value helps our stakeholders get the job of governance done, in a way that activates our theory of change.

SiX's mission is to make collaborative governance the norm. This requires that our core stakeholders—legislators, issue advocates, and grassroots organizations—shift away from traditional mindsets and behaviors and build the capacity to govern in fundamentally different ways.

Our thought leadership, civic education, and narrative work create the conditions for this kind of personal transformation, but they alone are not enough to catalyze it. For this transformation to take root, we must walk alongside our stakeholders as they get the job of governance done, guiding and supporting them to apply collaborative governance principles at every step.

But we cannot impose our involvement. State legislators, issue advocates, and grassroots organizations must opt in to the kind of trusting, long-term relationship needed for transformation to arise. We must earn their engagement, and be able to do so at scale.

We believe state legislators, issue advocates, and grassroots organizations will allow us to walk with and guide them only to the extent we help them get their job done. Our value proposition explains how we do this, and how we advance our theory of change by doing so.

Here is how our value proposition works.

SiX's core stakeholders choose to engage with us because we:

- Help state legislators, issue advocates, and grassroots organizations make progress toward their policy goals regardless of political context, and because our programming helps them feel respected, powerful, and in solidarity with others.

We can uniquely offer this value as a result of our ability to:

- Add great value in our stakeholders' most important policy fights, both in contexts where progressive legislation is likely to pass, and in contexts where this is not likely. Notably:
  - We serve legislators in their governance role, supporting them on multiple levels through capacity building, community, and strategy and implementation support. This fills a glaring gap in infrastructure within the electorally focused system.
  - We contribute the organizing savvy, procedural know-how, and relationships (both within and outside the statehouse, as well as across state lines and at the national level), needed for state legislative success. This helps our champions step into their full agency and leadership within power structures that seek to preserve the status quo.
  - We put legislators, movement-rooted policy organizations, and grassroots organizations into trusting, lasting relationship. Uniquely, we help these parties learn from and build with one another in a way that makes them stronger together.
  - We connect state-level policy to national and/or federal movements while upholding the integrity of state-level interests and efforts. The resulting shared power is greater than the sum of independent power across actors.
- Unlock deep transformation within individuals, shifting how they practice governance. Notably:
  - Within our own organization, we practice the values we seek to bring into the world. This makes key aspects of the future we're working toward tangible for our staff. This firsthand experience teaches us what it takes to build new worlds, and we reflect that insight in our programming.
  - We are not transactional. We support legislators and advocates on their policy agendas, not ours. This helps bring stakeholders into trusting relationship with us.

- We treat legislators and advocates according to our values. We create safe, trusting spaces that put participants in touch with their own humanity and the humanity of others. This helps our stakeholders adopt an orientation the existing system rarely allows, but which is critical for collaborative governance transformation, including: vulnerability; interdependence; a willingness to lean in with curiosity and self-reflection; and the ability to grapple with complexity, nuance, and difficult conversations.
- Balance the long-term, end-game strategy with responsive support. Notably:
  - We offer compelling storytelling that envisions a future where communities have real agency to shape their conditions and outcomes. Through transformative personal experiences, we give stakeholders a tangible taste of this irresistible future, making it feel not only possible but within reach. By presenting a concrete alternative to the dominant paradigm, we offer stakeholders a choice: to accept the status quo or to fight for something new.
  - We help stakeholders connect their immediate roles and battles with the broader, long-arc strategy for systemic change. By doing so, we enable them to see their work as part of a larger movement, connecting their own stories and experiences to a collective vision for transformation.

In doing so, through the "how" of our work, we:

- Give stakeholders a taste of a future they may not have thought was possible, or perhaps had never even contemplated, but now find irresistible.
- Help them connect their own stories and experiences to the bigger picture fight for this irresistible future.
- Help them believe that they have more agency to effect change than they might have thought.
- Help them realize that we are stronger together.
- Help them shift their definition of success and connect the fight for a new future to changes in governance practices.
- Help them build the muscle for ongoing practice of collaborative governance.

We aspire to live more fully into this value proposition as we continue our strategic evolution during our second decade.

OUR STRENGTH: PRACTICAL MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Clarity about the sources of our power highlights several important managerial implications for our priorities and programming in SiX's next decade.

01 We can only inspire and guide legislators and partners in worldbuilding because we are actively worldbuilding within SiX.

02 Both our state and issue capabilities are essential to our value proposition.

01

We can only inspire and guide legislators and partners in worldbuilding because we are actively worldbuilding within SiX. Our values are the foundation of our entire strategy, shaping not just what we do, but how we do it. Every managerial decision must embody and reinforce these values.

Moving forward, our hiring and people development efforts must prioritize finding and nurturing individuals who can deepen and sustain our culture of care. At the same time, we must continue evolving our operational policies, procedures, and processes to ensure that SiX becomes an even more people-centered, liberatory, caring, and joyful mission-driven community.

These values must remain our compass, even when upholding them requires difficult trade-offs—including financial decisions or navigating pressures from funders and external stakeholders. Staying true to our values is not just an aspiration—it is essential to realizing the future we are building.

02

Both our state and issue capabilities are essential to our value proposition. We are uniquely positioned to inspire, equip, and support people to engage with one another differently within state-level governance systems. Achieving this requires not just vision but deep, practical support for state legislators, advocates, and grassroots leaders as they navigate the realities of governing.

To be effective, we must have an intimate understanding of state governance ecosystems—including the ability to navigate political landscapes, build trust and credibility, and cultivate key relationships both inside and outside the statehouse. Equally important, we must maintain strong in-house issue and policy expertise while serving as a bridge between state legislators, people-powered movements at the state level, and national issue movements. This interconnected approach ensures that policies are both grounded in local realities and informed by broader movement strategies.

Over SiX's first decade, our issue and state teams built the foundational capabilities that define our organization today and which shape the very strategy we now pursue. Now, as we enter our next decade, our goal is not simply to expand our current programming within existing structures, but to evolve strategically.

We envision adapted and strengthened programming, reimagined organizational structures, and an updated financial model—one designed to sustain and scale these critical capabilities. This evolution will ensure that SiX continues to meet the needs of state legislators, advocates, and grassroots leaders while advancing our mission in deeper, more transformative ways.

OUR ROADMAP

This strategy will guide SiX's growth and evolution as we enter our second decade. Our strategic roadmap outlines our journey over the next three years. For SiX, this journey involves decisions about how we will bring our strategy to life in our programming, the structure that supports our programming, and the financial model that enables it all.

THE WORK AHEAD

Further design and alignment remains for three major, interrelated components of our work and our organization:

01   **PROGRAM MODEL**

02   **OPERATING MODEL**

03   **FINANCIAL MODEL**

01 **PROGRAM MODEL.** A program model defines the programming and services through which an organization delivers its value proposition.

SiX's current program model—organized by issue-specific program areas and separate state-specific programming—has been shaped by the historical structure of our funding. While we have made meaningful progress in working across these structural silos, we recognize that our existing model does not yet fully activate our theory of change.

We have already begun internal conversations to build a shared understanding of our current program model and the collective desire for change. The work ahead requires us to step back and reimagine what outcomes our theory of change calls for, what programming will best deliver those outcomes, and how all the pieces fit together into a cohesive, integrated whole.

As we engage in this process, we will build on our existing strengths while refining our approach to better scale and sustain the impact of collaborative governance.

02 **OPERATING MODEL.** An operating model defines the organizational form that best supports a program model. This goes beyond structure—the "hardware" of an organization—to include its "software"—its culture, decision-making processes, and ways of working.

Our current operating model has hindered our ability to deliver more intersectional programming and provide a more integrated, unified experience for legislators and partners. Like many organizations, we are structured hierarchically, with departments defining where, how, and by whom different aspects of our work get done. However, our aspiration to deliver more intersectional, people-centered programming has been constrained by these hierarchical, department-based structures and processes.

The work ahead requires us to explore new ways for staff to envision, fundraise for, and implement programming. We are excited to take inspiration from non-traditional organizational models—ones that foster emergence, distributed decision-making, and deeper cross-team connection.

We aim to dream boldly while also recognizing that meaningful organizational change takes time. We are committed to approaching this transformation thoughtfully—aligning on a shared vision and moving forward in a staged, iterative, and learning-oriented way.

03 **FINANCIAL MODEL.** A strategic financial model aligns the right types and sources of funding with an organization's program and operating model. By explicitly integrating financial considerations into programmatic and structural design, we can ensure that our vision is not only ambitious but also financially feasible and scalable.

Our current financial model—like our program and operating models—reflects the legacy of historical funding structures. It has been well-suited for growing independent, grant-funded portfolios but is not designed to support the more intersectional, integrated work we now aim to expand.

Moving forward, we will envision and validate a new financial model that aligns the value created by our stakeholder-centered, intersectional approach with funding sources that sustain and scale that value. We recognize that this shift will require changes not just within SiX, but also within the funding community itself. Actively partnering with funders to evolve their approaches will be critical, and our success in this effort will influence our pace of organizational transformation.

OUR NEXT THREE YEARS

SiX's organizational evolution to fully live into our strategy will be a multi-year journey, requiring time for our program, operating, and financial models to adjust and mature.

The next three years—the foundational years of SiX's second decade—will be a period of critical decision-making about the program, operating, and financial models we seek to build. During this time, we will define our vision for these models and initiate the organizational changes necessary to bring them into practice.

Certain aspects of SiX's organizational context are important to note as we embark on this next phase. With the publication of this strategy in 2025, SiX's long-time Co-Executive Directors, Neha Patel and Jessie Ulibarri, will step back from their leadership roles. Over more than seven formative years, Neha and Jessie guided SiX's growth and evolution, leading the organization to the strategic clarity we have today.

As SiX enters its second decade, we do so under a new leadership configuration—not only at the executive director level but across multiple levels of the organization. This transition marks the beginning of a new phase in SiX's strategic journey, where we will build on our foundation while embracing the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Within this context, the next three years will be a period of both continuity and evolution. SiX will remain grounded in the strategic direction, clarity of purpose, and analysis captured in this document while also benefiting from fresh leadership perspectives and strengths in shaping and implementing the next era of our organizational response.

Specifically, our next three years are expected to involve:

- Deepening ownership of the strategy across all levels of leadership. This includes further democratizing knowledge among program leaders and staff, ensuring they can actively shape strategic discussions with agency. It also involves onboarding new leadership and transitioning stewardship of the strategy process.

- Designing SiX's aspirational program, operating, and financial models. We will refine our vision for how these models support integrated, intersectional work that activates our theory of change.

- Implementing initial changes across these models. As we refine our approach, we will begin making the necessary structural shifts to activate our strategy in practice.

- Engaging in ongoing strategic learning and preparing for SiX's next strategic planning process. Through our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) learning processes and organizational governance spaces, we will continue to learn, iterate, and adapt—laying the groundwork for the next phase of SiX's evolution and our next strategic planning process.

This roadmap outlines SiX's strategic journey over the next three years. However, it is intentionally not a fixed plan. SiX conducts its planning through annual goal-setting, planning, and budgeting processes. Instead, this roadmap serves as a guide—a framework of critical decisions that will help shape multi-year leadership agendas and inform SiX's annual planning processes in the years ahead. It provides strategic direction while allowing for flexibility, adaptation, and ongoing learning as we move forward.

CONCLUSION

The current blossoming of authoritarianism within the federal government presents challenging terrain to navigate. Yet, SiX's strategy is not a set of reactive tactics for the present moment. Rather, it is an expression of *who we are*. By clarifying our purpose, strategic analysis, and sources of strength, this strategy will serve as our compass. As SiX enters its second decade, our strategy grounds us in who we are and who we are becoming as we fulfill what we are called upon to do in our moment, with our link in the chain of justice.

APPENDIX
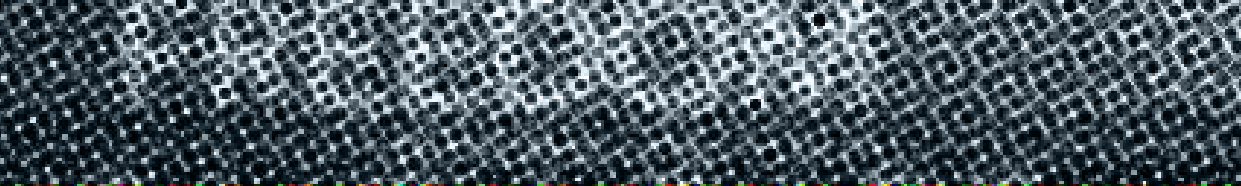
APPRECIATIONS

This strategy is a collective creation, shaped by the wisdom, leadership, and experiences of many.

It is inspired by the courage of state legislators, advocates, and grassroots organizations who are forging a new and better way of governing. It is informed by their feedback on SiX's support and partnership, which has ensured that our approach remains responsive and relevant. It draws on the ancestral wisdom of our peoples, reminding us of the power of interdependence, collective care, and healing.

This strategy is also influenced by the many individuals and communities who teach and inspire us—our families, professional coaches, organizational peers (including those pioneering collaborative governance at the local level), thought leaders we respect, and our movement friends and co-conspirators. Each of these groups has played a meaningful role in shaping our vision.

Finally, this strategy has been shaped by those who directly engaged in its ideation and articulation, as recognized below. Their contributions have ensured that this strategy is not just aspirational but deeply rooted in the realities of our work and the possibilities ahead.

OUR STAFF

This strategy emerges directly from the work and leadership of SiX's staff, who have built and run the programming that proves collaborative governance is the answer. It reflects their vision, wisdom, and ability to inspire funding partners to support innovative work that pushes beyond traditional electoral, policy, and bill-focused investments at the state level.

It is also shaped by the brilliant storytelling of our fundraising and communications teams, who amplify our work with funders and external stakeholders. And it honors the critical contributions of our operational and administrative teams, whose efforts ensure that SiX's values are woven into the fabric of our organization.

Notably, SiX's Operating Committee—comprising senior department leaders from Agriculture and Food Systems; Democracy; Economic Justice and Legislative Affairs; Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice; Research; Communications; Development; and Operations—has played a key leadership role in building and governing the SiX we have today. Throughout this strategy process, their wisdom, productive dialogue, and programmatic insight have directly influenced both our strategic decisions and how we shaped the strategy process itself, including staff participation and the intentional pacing of our work.

Additionally, our Monitoring and Evaluation team provided deep leadership in developing our theory of change, while our Operations team led the crucial work of articulating our values. Their contributions have been fundamental in shaping the path ahead.
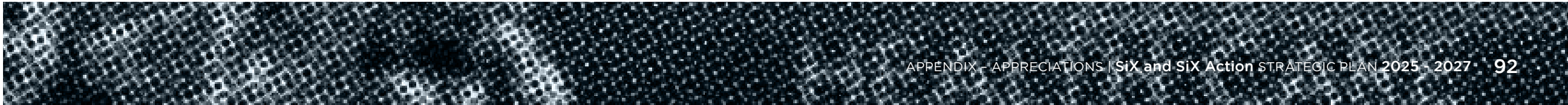
OUR BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

We are deeply grateful to our SiX and SiX Action board members for sharing with us the wisdom that arises not only from their professional movement roles, but also from their personal stories. Their support and collaboration have been instrumental in clarifying SiX's strategy. Each board member brought unique perspectives from within our movement, offering wisdom and challenging our thinking in ways that strengthened our decisions, all while remaining steadfastly supportive. This incredible partnership with fellow movement leaders has been both productive and inspiring, and we are profoundly thankful for their commitment, leadership, and belief in this work.

OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM

SiX's executive team stewarded this process with care and intention, ensuring that our strategy honors the power of what we have built, captures the nuance of our distinctive approach, and remains authentic to who we are as an organization. Their judgment and wisdom guided this work in alignment with our values, fostering an inclusive and collaborative process.

Notably, the executive team shaped a thoughtful and accessible process that met staff at all levels where they were, ensuring they could deeply understand the strategic decisions and their implications within the context of their work. This strong foundation positions our team to lead with confidence as they engage in upcoming decisions around SiX's program model, operating model, and financial model.

OUR STRATEGY PLANNER

SiX partnered with Nick Takamine, Founder and Principal Consultant of Syntelos, to guide our strategic planning process. Nick is building toward a future in which our economic and governance systems are equitable and just, and in which humans exist in harmony with our planet. His contribution is to help nonprofit organizations build this future by setting strategy that is worthy of their missions. He does this by helping to set strategy that boldly envisions an organization's highest purpose and translates it into practical managerial implications.

OUR STRATEGY PROCESS

BACKGROUND

SiX's first strategic plan, completed in 2019, guided the organization's evolution and continued strategic refinement through 2024. Notably, that strategic plan established SiX's bold purpose of governance systems change through the support of state legislators.

It also established core elements of our strategic analysis, including:

1. Our movement prioritizes electoral power at the expense of governance.
2. State legislators should be seen as strategically positioned movement actors, not just accountability targets.
3. Legislators require support tailored to their state's unique context.
4. We must actively work to change the conditions of power.
5. Achieving lasting change requires challenging the dominant worldview.

This current strategic process builds on that foundation, translating our highest purpose into practical managerial implications. It clarifies why we are here, how we understand our strategic challenge, and how we will position ourselves to overcome it. Through this process, we are laying the groundwork for the next era of SiX's impact.

Envisioning our highest purpose and translating that purpose into practical managerial implications

We believe that setting good strategy involves connecting a compelling purpose to a clear analysis to a coherent organizational response, through a set of interconnected strategic choices.

The table below summarizes the strategic choices outlined in this strategy and highlights the relationships among them. By structuring our discussions and decisions in this way, we moved beyond broad ideation and high-level alignments to engage with difficult organizational questions, evaluate alternative options, and make intentional, decisive choices that shape our path forward.

TABLE: Critical Choices in Mission-Driven Strategy

QUESTION	ANSWERED IN THE FORM OF	DESCRIPTION
Purpose Why are we here?	1.1 Vision	Describes the future the organization is fighting for.
	1.2 Mission	Defines the organization's unique contribution to that fight.
Analysis What's our strategic challenge?	2.1 Diagnosis	Frames the challenge an organization must overcome to fulfill its unique contribution, and the superpower positioning it to make a difference.
	2.2 Theory of Change	Presents a perspective on how the organization can overcome the strategic challenge with the help of its superpower.
Response How will we show up to overcome the challenge?	3.1 Value Proposition	Identifies the core stakeholders an organization must engage and the unique value it offers them to fulfill the theory of change.
	3.2 Program Model*	Articulates the programming and/or services through which the organization will deliver that value proposition.
	3.3 Operating Model*	Outlines the organizational form that best supports the program/service model (including structure, process, and culture).
	3.4 Financial Model*	Aligns appropriate funding types and sources to thedifferent kinds of value arising from the program and operating model.
	3.5 Roadmap	Sketches the organization's multi-year journey to fully embody its value proposition, program model, operating model, and business model.

* Our strategy process is ongoing, even as we publish this document. In particular, our discussions to design and refine an aspirational program model, operating model, and financial model for SiX's second decade are still in progress. The strategic decisions and practical managerial implications outlined here will serve as a guide, ensuring alignment and continuity as this work evolves.

Worldbuilding within our strategic planning process

We believe that building new worlds begins with practicing them. This principle shapes not only our programming but also how we approach our internal work and decision-making.

We recognize that strategic planning processes can sometimes perpetuate harmful dynamics—taking an extractive stance toward staff and stakeholders, creating merely performative opportunities for input, or relying on traditional practices that fail to meaningfully invite or hear the voices of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people; immigrants; LGBTQ+ people; women; and those experiencing poverty.

We committed to leading a different kind of process—one that ensures the people most impacted by our strategy are valued, have agency, and can actively shape and contribute to it. Our goal was to design a process that shared power, invited meaningful input, ensured accessibility for all, and affirmed the work and contributions of our staff. In a sense, we sought to practice collaborative governance in our own strategic planning.

We followed several collaborative governance principles in our process, including:

1. Co-creation with those most impacted. Organizational strategy, like policy, should be co-created by the people who have the greatest stake in the results.

    A cross-hierarchical group of staff—including assistant-, director-, and senior management-level team members—designed the process, framed decisions, synthesized feedback, and shaped key outcomes. We also gathered robust input from external stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, and surveys conducted as part of our impact measurement processes, program evaluations, brand assessments, and thought leadership efforts.

    We engaged the full organization non-hierarchically, embedding discussions into everyday organizational spaces rather than relying solely on formal strategic planning meetings. For example, in preparation for a key SiX convening, we

hosted an internal "fishbowl" discussion where staff observed SiX's co-executive directors articulate collaborative governance and then provided feedback to refine it. Similarly, we sharpened our vision, mission, superpower, and theory of change through all-staff discussions, and lessons from in-depth case studies highlighted examples of collaborative governance in our work.

We also created cross-hierarchical spaces to address our toughest strategic challenges and build a shared vision for the future. This included joint discussions between senior executives and program leaders—both in standing management meetings and at an in-person retreat—where every major decision in this strategy was deliberated and refined. Additionally, we brought particularly nuanced or high-stakes questions to our boards of directors, drawing on their diverse movement roles and lived experiences. These discussions ensured that our strategy was firmly rooted in the realities of on-the-ground programming and the broader movement ecosystem.

In addition, staff played a direct role in shaping key concepts and language. Program leaders helped to update our definition of collaborative governance and refine how we describe the people and identities we center in our work. A non-hierarchical staff committee led the drafting of our updated organizational values. All staff were invited to provide input on strategic decisions, including our vision, mission, and theory of change, as well as the narrative telling our story in this strategy document.

This co-creation process ensured that our strategy was deeply rooted in the realities of our work, as free from jargon as possible, and fully reflective of our values. It also helped us avoid patronizing language, patriarchal framing, and other manifestations of white supremacy, ensuring that both our process and our final output remained aligned with our principles.

2. Leveraging complementary strengths. Just as in the governance process, co-creation in an organizational strategy process is most powerful when we fully leverage the complementary strengths of a diverse coalition.

This strategy reflects the vision, expertise, and lived experience of SiX's staff and external stakeholders—the people closest to our work. Their insights, articulated through case studies, blog posts, articles, and internal conversations, played a pivotal role in shaping our strategic direction.

Our program and operational department leaders were instrumental in bridging the gap between daily activities and broader strategic sense-making. They also ensured that the process remained accessible and relevant for staff, to arm staff with the context and knowledge to contribute their own thinking.

Our executive team brought together the collective knowledge of the organization, identifying critical nuances and exercising balanced judgment to guide major strategic decisions. Meanwhile, our strategy consultant supported a thoughtful, structured journey that helped connect our bold purpose to practical steps forward. Integrating these complementary strengths required a deliberate approach. We created space and flexibility in our meetings and timeline to foster deep, meaningful dialogue. Rather than confining discussions to formal strategic planning sessions, we embedded them throughout our full range of organizational spaces and processes to maximize collective sense-making.

Throughout this process, we remained committed to practicing principled tension—acknowledging and working productively through differences in perspective and opinion—ensuring that our strategy was shaped by the richness of diverse experiences and insights.

3. Creating conditions for meaningful agency. To fully leverage complementary strengths in a collaborative effort—whether in policymaking or organizational strategy—people must have meaningful agency to contribute.

We recognized that simply soliciting input is not enough to foster deep engagement or generate the most productive discussions. Not every staff member could be present in every strategy conversation, leading to varying levels of depth and nuance in understanding. We also acknowledged the limitations of written materials, which cannot fully capture complexity or contextualize decisions for all scenarios. Additionally, we knew that sensitive

frictions, misalignments, and differing perspectives were less likely to surface in large meetings or formal settings.

With these challenges in mind, we intentionally designed conditions for meaningful input and engagement.

Beyond standard best practices in facilitation and internal communications—such as combining written, spoken, and visual communication; offering evergreen resources alongside real-time dialogue; inviting input through multiple formats; and fostering a psychologically safe environment—we invested significant time and energy in offline, one-on-one conversations and team-specific strategy discussions.

These efforts helped build contextualized understanding, surface conflicts, and address differences with nuance and care.

This included informal, in-person discussions between senior management and SiX's program area leaders, fostering trusted exchanges to address sensitive topics. It also included full-day workshops facilitated by an executive director and senior staff with each program area, allowing teams to situate the strategy within their specific work, while benefiting from rich, in-person trust-building and communication. These intentional investments created the understanding and trust necessary for staff to share their genuine thoughts on the toughest issues in the most productive, solution-driven ways.

Our commitment to these goals extended the strategy process beyond our initial expectations, but this was a deliberate and purposeful tradeoff. The result is a strategy that doesn't just exist on paper—it lives within our people and our work.

This process has equipped everyone at SiX to step into their leadership, ensuring that as we continue refining and implementing our strategy in our second decade, we do so with collective ownership, clarity, and commitment.

SIX

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